

## BOG TURTLES AND NEW US 301

### RARE, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Rare, threatened, and endangered (RTE) species are wildlife and plant species that are in danger of extinction, and are protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act, and Title 7 of the Annotated Delaware Code. Potential effects to RTE species and their habitat must be considered in transportation project decision-making. Working closely with Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), DelDOT has identified the Bog Turtle as the only RTE species that potentially exists within the US 301 project area.

### THE BOG TURTLE – A POTENTIAL RTE IN THE PROJECT AREA

The bog turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*) exists within New Castle County and potentially within the project area. Bog turtles and their habitat are identified through a two-step process:

**Phase I Survey** identifies potential bog turtle habitat areas within existing wetland systems. (Note: Phase I Surveys do not determine the presence of bog turtles)

- 133 wetlands investigated from April to October 2005
- Potential habitat areas have been identified along each of the four Retained Alternative's alignments

**Phase II/III Surveys** determine if bog turtles exist in habitat areas identified during phase I surveys. Surveys are being conducted in potential habitats along the alignment of each Retained Alternative.

- Surveys are conducted by state-approved bog turtle surveyors who conduct four site visits and survey for 6 person hours per acre of wetland.
- Surveys will be completed by July 2006.

#### **If bog turtles are not located along the Recommended Preferred Alternative:**

- The US 301 project will proceed as scheduled
- A Draft Environmental Impact Statement would be circulated and a public hearing conducted in late 2006 and a Final Environmental Impact Statement would be published in early 2007

#### **If bog turtles are located along the Recommended Preferred Alternative:**

- The project team would begin informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding the bog turtle population(s) and the potential impact of the Recommended Preferred Alternative on them
- These consultations may lead to added studies that would take additional time to complete. The results would be reported in a Biological Assessment, which requires USFWS concurrence.
- Should these added steps be necessary, the project schedule would likely be affected.